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# The Malvern Boy.



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## The Malvern Boy.

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"THE sun will never rise this morning, I think," said little Joe Croft, as he got up for the third time to look through the casement, and then crept back to his little bed to dream of the busy day before him.

Joe had lost both his father and mother when he was an infant. He lived with his old grandfather and grandmother, who had a cottage near Malvern.

Some of the children for whom I write this story will remember having seen some beautiful hills looking blue in the distance, which they have heard called the Malvern Hills. They are between Worcestershire and Herefordshire, and are seen a great way off. There is on the Worcestershire side of them a spring of very pure clear water, which is thought good for many complaints; and a great number of ladies and gentlemen go there every summer to drink this water, and enjoy the fine air. The hills are very steep; but zig-zag walks are cut on their sides, in order that people may get up them more easily. Still, those who are out of health often find themselves very tired before they get to the top, and are glad to hire a donkey,—you may always see several standing at the bottom of the hill; the saddles covered with clean white linen cloths; and a boy by the side of each, to lead or drive them. But what has all this to do with Joe? you will say.

Joe was to go that morning to try his fortune as a donkey-boy. His grandfather was a hard-working man, and used to earn a comfortable living by going out to plant and trim the pretty

g. ns that you see to almost every house. When he had nothing else to do, he used to work in his own, which was as neat as hands could make it. His old wife and little Joe weeded and swept the garden, and twice a week took their vegetables and flowers to Malvern, where they always found plenty of customers for them. Old Isaac's vegetables were the finest in the neighbourhood; and no one tied up nosegays so well as Dame Croft. She looked so trim and neat, and Joe so healthy and merry, that strangers used often to notice them, and buy their roses and pinks.

A happier boy than Joe, till he was eleven years old, you will never see. He was always busy. When there was no work to be done in the garden, he could do many a little thing in the house—sweep the hearth, fetch wood, set the breakfast and tea, clean shoes. In the long winter evenings his grandmother had taught him to knit; and a proud boy was Joe when his grandfather first put on a pair of stockings of his knitting. He was careful and bandy, and always pleased to be employed; but that which he liked best

of all was, to feed and take care of Roughy, the donkey. You must not suppose, from his name, that he was wild and shaggy-looking—such as you see grazing on commons, or by the road-side: he was fat and sleek, and looked as if he had always been well taken care of. He had been given to Isaac when a foal, and soon grew very fond of little Joe, who was then just beginning to speak. Joe liked to pat him, and to carry him cabbage-stalks to eat; but when the little animal wanted to rub his face against his, he would push him away, and say, “Don’t, you too roughy;” and so in time every body called him Roughy. It was Roughy who carried the vegetables to market; and latterly, when old Dame Croft became infirm, she used to ride between the panniers.

I have told you how happy Joe was till he was eleven years old. Sorrow then came to him, as it does sooner or later to us all: his dear grandmother fell sick.

Isaac and Joe watched over her many a long month. She was very patient. She knew she had not long to live. She knew her husband and grandson

would miss her sadly, and she felt sorry to leave them; but she was sure that God would take care of them, and that He would not take her from them unless it was better for them all that they should part. She prayed with them and for them, and often talked to Joe, and begged him to think of her when she was gone, and to shew his love for her by remembering all she had taught him. She talked to him of that happy world in which she hoped they should all meet again, and bid him pray constantly to God to make him fit to live with angels and "just men made perfect."

Isaac was a good man, and knew that it was sinful to murmur at any trial appointed to us; but when he closed his dear wife's eyes, and followed her to the grave, he could not help praying that, if it were God's will, he might soon be taken from this world. The sight of his orphan grandson, crying bitterly, reminded him that he ought to wish to live for his sake, and that he must not spend his time in vain sorrow, but do his appointed task cheerfully. He prayed constantly for help to do this; and such prayers are always



heard. Other misfortunes came upon him. The rheumatism, which he had caught by getting up in the night to wait on the poor old woman, had fixed in his limbs, and rendered him quite a cripple: the doctor gave him no hopes of recovering the use of them, or of ever being able to do another day's work.

The first thing to do was, to let his bit of ground, which he was no longer able to cultivate. A neighbour offered to take it off his hands; and when they had finished their bargain, "I've been thinking, Isaac," said the man, "that if you've no use for that donkey, Tom Sparks, who keeps donkeys to let out at Malvern, would be glad to buy him; and, if you like, I'll speak to him about it."

Isaac did not answer immediately. He did not like to part with the donkey that had carried his wife, and was indeed the pet of the whole family; but the doctor's bill was a very heavy one. He had spent a great deal on wine and other things for his wife during her illness. It was well for him that he had saved a good sum when he was in health, or he could not have paid for all this, and buried his wife decently, as

he had done; but his small stock was nearly at an end, and he thought it would be wrong to keep the donkey when he could get a little money for it. Just then he heard a sob. He guessed what it was; and he could not make up his mind to grieve Joe. So he thanked his neighbour, and told him he would consider about it.

When the man was gone, Joe came out of the corner in which he had hid himself, that he might not be seen crying, and came up to the old man.

“Grandfather,” said he, “why cannot I take Roughy to the stand at Malvern as well as Tom Sparks’s boys, and bring the money home to you, instead of selling him, poor fellow? He won’t go so well with anybody else as he will with me. Please, grandfather, let me try, if it’s only once. I can get up and have all things comfortable for you in the morning before I go, and when I come home at night I can put every thing away, and get the supper,—do, dear grandfather!” And he looked so earnestly up in his face, that he could not say no.

It was soon settled that Joe should

try ; and this morning, as I have said, he was to make his first attempt.

When he next woke, the sun was high in the heavens. He started up, and at first was afraid that he had overslept himself ; but, on looking out, he saw that it was still early. He dressed himself, and went down stairs softly, for fear of awaking his grandfather. First he lighted the fire, set on the kettle, and got every thing ready for breakfast. He then went out to the shed in which Roughy had been shut up all night, led him to the pond to drink, and then rubbed him down.

“ Roughy, my man,” said he, “ perhaps you will carry a lady to-day ! — there will be an honour for you, and an honour for her ; for no lady ever rode a better donkey than my Roughy.”

Roughy pricked up his ears, and looked as if he almost understood what was said to him ; but I believe it was only that he liked to hear again the merry voice of the boy, who had been sad of late, and had not sung, and whistled, and talked to him as he used to do when he cleaned him.

When Joe went back to the house, he found his grandfather sitting by the fire.

“What! up already, grandfather?” said he.

“Yes, my boy. I didn’t like you to go out without the old man’s blessing; so now let us say our prayers, and have our breakfast comfortably, before you are off.”

They knelt down. Isaac always prayed with his heart, and not with his lips only; but this morning he did so with more earnestness than usual, as he repeated the beautiful second collect for morning prayer. He was not particularly afraid that any accident should happen to his darling boy—he knew that he rode well, and that Roughy was quiet and safe; but he feared greater dangers,—he feared that he might be led into sin. He knew that he must meet with careless boys, who would set him bad examples; that he would hear oaths and wicked talk; and that the habit of lounging about, waiting to be hired, was a bad one to get into: he felt sorry that he had given his consent to what might lead his grandson into temptation.

Joe had been taught to know and to feel what a solemn thing prayer is. He generally tried to collect his thoughts ; but this morning, I am sorry to say, they were wandering to Malvern and Roughy, when he heard his grandfather's voice tremble as he prayed that they might not fall into sin, or run into any kind of danger. This recalled his attention ; and he humbly asked God's help and protection.

Their breakfast was soon over. The old man stuffed a piece of bread and cheese into his pocket : and he was setting off, when Betty Smith, a neighbour, came running in : " Oh," said she, panting for breath, " I was afraid I was too late. I came to wish you good luck ; and see what I have brought you, Joe !" shewing a piece of linen folded up—" it is a cover for Roughy's saddle. They all have it at Malvern."

" Thank ye, Mrs. Smith, I'm sure," said Joe, his eyes sparkling to think his donkey would look like the others ; " good bye." He had gone a few steps, and then turned back. " If you could look in now and then, Mrs. Smith, and talk to grandfather a bit—he will be very lonely all day without Roughy and me."

"I will, never fear," said the kind dame; and looking after him, as he again trotted off, "Now that's the sweetest tempered boy I ever set eyes on—always thinking of his grandfather and of every body else before himself."

When Joe got within sight of the place where the boys stood with their donkeys, his spirits began to fail; he had not been used to be much with other children, and he felt awkward and shy. He stopped at a short distance from them, unfolded the cover Betty had made for him, and spread it over the saddle. Presently all eyes were turned towards him; there was a short whispering amongst them, and then one called out:

"Hallo, you-sir, who are you; and what do you come here for?"

Joe's colour rose: he did not like to be spoken to in such a tone, and he made no answer.

"What's your name, I say?" asked the boy again, in a louder tone.

"Joe Croft;—but you might speak more civilly."

"Why should I speak civil to you, who are come where you have no business?"

“Hav’n’t I as much right to come here as you?”

“No,” said the boy. “We were here first; there is not half custom enough for us; and we don’t want every scamp that can pick up a donkey off the common to come among us.”

“I am no scamp, and I didn’t pick up my donkey off the common,” returned Joe, getting very red and angry. They would probably have come to high words, but just then a party of ladies and gentlemen appeared in sight. The boys immediately surrounded them.

“Please to ride to-day, ma’am?”

“My donkey trots and canters.”

“My donkey is as quiet as a lamb.”

“My donkey will step as fast as a horse.”

One or two of the ladies mounted and rode off, the others refused; but the boys continued to follow them, and to press them to ride. At last one gentleman grew angry, and threatened to see if there was not a beadle in the place, to prevent their teasing the ladies. Then coming up to Joe, who had stood silent all this time, looking wistfully at every body that passed, in hopes they might take a fancy to Roughy:

"Here's the only boy who has not been troublesome. Can your donkey carry a lady?"

"Yes, please, sir; my grandmother used to ride him."

The other boys laughed insolently.

"His grandmother, then, was a lady, it seems!" said they.

"She was as good as any lady in the land," cried Joe; and his eyes flashed. Then, recollecting that it was disrespectful to the gentleman to quarrel in this manner before him, he looked down quite ashamed.

The gentleman saw what passed in his mind, and excused him. The others continued to laugh louder than before.

"A fine lady, truly! We shall hear next that my young master is a gentleman, if these are his manners."

"Follow me," said the gentleman to Joe; and then turning to the rest, "You may come, if you please, and my servant shall teach you manners with a horsewhip."

The boys fell back; and the gentleman walked on for about a quarter of a mile, and stopped at a door, where he went in, telling Joe to wait.

It was some time before any one



came. He buckled up the girths, looked at the reins, brushed the flies away from Roughy's face, and every time he heard a footstep his heart beat quicker. At last the door opened, and the gentleman came out again, with a lady leaning on his arm; she was dressed in black, and looked very pale and thin; Joe felt her tremble as he helped her on.

"Roughy's quite quiet, ma'am," said he. The lady gave him a smile; and the gentleman took the bridle.

"Where's your stick," said he, "my lad?"

"Please, sir, Roughy does not want a stick,—he always does what I tell him."

They then went on, the gentleman walking by the side of the donkey, and Joe a little behind, to be ready if he was wanted. If Roughy was at all inclined to be lazy, he called to him; but he took care to keep so far off, that he might not seem to be listening to what the lady and gentleman were talking about. In this way they went up to the well; and there the lady, whose name was Mrs. Seymour, drank a glass of the water. She had lately lost her husband. The gentleman was her bro-

ther, who had come to settle her at Malvern, where she had been advised to go for the sake of her health. He could not stay with her, and was to leave her that day.

When they returned to the house, Mrs. Seymour said she should not want him again that day, but that he might come next morning by eight o'clock, and she would engage him for the whole day. The sky now grew cloudy; and rain coming on, which seemed likely to last for the rest of the day, Joe thought he had better return home. He had earned one shilling, and had the promise of half-a-crown for the next day; so he was tolerably satisfied, and eager to tell his grandfather all that had happened.

The next morning he was punctual to his time. Mrs. Seymour soon came out with a servant, who pushed Joe away, and said, "My mistress doesn't want a little ragged dirty boy to run after her."

"Gently, Thomas," said Mrs. Seymour, who overheard him, though he did not mean she should; "the boy is neither ragged nor dirty."

Poor Joe did not dare follow, and

Thomas led on the donkey. Roughy was not stubborn, but he had not been used to be with strangers, and he missed Joe, and turned his head from left to right to look for him. The lady complained that he did not go as well as he did the day before ; and told Thomas he had better call the boy. Thomas muttered that he would manage the cross-grained beast, and was beginning to beat him, when Joe, who had been anxiously watching them from a distance, now ran up :

“ Please, sir, don’t beat him ; he’s not sulky, only he does not understand what you say to him ; ” and he began to chirrup to Roughy, who immediately on hearing the well-known voice stepped briskly on.

Thomas was out of humour, but he did not venture to shew it before his mistress.

After riding for some time, Mrs. Seymour returned to the house, and told Joe she should not want him till two o’clock, and that he might go into the kitchen and have some dinner.

He felt rather shy at first among the strange servants, especially as he fancied Thomas did not like him. He was

not used to be idle, and he wished he might be allowed to help in doing something; but he was afraid to ask. The servants, after having stared at him, and looked to see if he had wiped his shoes, took no further notice of him; and dinner was not ready.

After some time he heard the cook say, in a tone of distress, "What in the world shall I do? they have not sent the mint I ordered with the other vegetables; and poor mistress's appetite is so bad, she will not be able to eat her lamb without mint-sauce,—when she was well, she never cared what she ate."

Joe felt sorry for the poor lady; he had seen how sickness had made his dear grandmother nice and fanciful about her food. He thought within himself, "I could run home and fetch some mint, and be back again before two;" so he ran off, unnoticed by the servants. He made all the haste he could; and when he came back, hot and out of breath, the cook called out to him:

"So you've been out to play with the rest of the good-for-nothing boys, I suppose? But I can tell you, you

shall have no dinner here, unless you are in at the proper time."

"I have not been at play, ma'am," said Joe, rather proudly. "I heard you say the lady could not eat her dinner without mint-sauce, and I ran home to get some out of my garden."

"And how far off is your home, my lad?" said the cook, rather sorry for having spoken so crossly.

"About a mile and a half, ma'am."

"Well, you're a good boy, and I'm obliged to you. You shall have a good dinner, though we've all done." So saying, she cut him a large slice of meat, and even took the pains to warm him some potatoes, to make amends for having scolded him when he did not deserve it.

Joe was very hungry; but when he saw the nice meat, he wished he could take it home to his grandfather, who, he knew, ought to have nourishing things, but hardly ever allowed himself any butcher's meat. He did not know whether this would be right; and when he had eaten his potatoes, he sat still, considering whether he might venture to speak to the cook.

"What's the matter with the boy?"

said gruff Thomas, who just then came into the kitchen. "Are you too dainty to eat good roast beef?"

"No, indeed, I am not dainty; but please, sir, might I take it home?"

"Nay, it's nothing to me whether you eat it here or at home," said Thomas, walking off.

The cook, who was good natured, though hasty, saw that he did not touch the mug of beer that had been put for him; "Perhaps," thought she, "he wants to take that home too, and have a comfortable supper after his day's work;" and she told him he might have a soda-water bottle to put his beer in, if he liked. Joe was delighted; he thanked her, poured his beer carefully into the bottle, wrapped up his meat in a clean handkerchief he had in his pocket, and asked the cook to be kind enough to take care of it for him till he went home in the evening. He had scarcely done so, when he was called to go out with Mrs. Seymour.

"Thomas," said she, as he helped her on the donkey, "you will be wanted at home: the donkey seems quiet, and the boy steady; I will try whether I cannot do without you."

Thomas bowed, and went back into the house, not quite knowing whether he was glad or sorry to be excused going with his mistress.

The lady did not speak much to Joe. He saw she looked sad, and often sighed; and she would stop, and seem to forget where she was. Joe wished he could do any thing to please her. As they went through a lane, he saw some honeysuckles and wild roses; and he climbed up and gathered them, and tied them up neatly, as he had seen the old Dame Croft do.

"Will you please to have some flowers, ma'am?" said he, in a timid voice.

"Thank you, my good boy," said the lady, and smiled gently as she took them.

But Joe saw that, though she smelt to them, and looked pleased at first, she soon began to pull them in pieces, as if she was thinking of something else; and Joe felt sorry when he saw the rose-leaves strewed on the ground.

She rode a much longer time that afternoon, and once or twice got off to rest herself in the shade, while Joe led Roughy away to some distance, and allowed him to munch some grass.

When they came back, she said : " You and your donkey suit me very well, my little boy ; and I should like to engage you till I go. I shall probably stay at Malvern some months." Then she went into the house, and rang for Thomas.

When he came up, she said : " I have just told the boy I should engage him for the time I stay here ; and though he is not ragged, it will be as well to make him look more respectable. I therefore wish you to take him to the tailor's, and order him a suit of clothes."

Thomas, who had begun to think he should be very tired of following his mistress about on foot, who was ordered to be out some hours in every day, was not sorry for this plan ; and he thought it would be for his mistress's credit that the boy should be well dressed. So he did not start any objection, and only observed that Joe ought not to be allowed to take his clothes home, but that he might put them on each morning when he came, and change again before he returned at night.

Joe's happiness was complete at the prospect of his new clothes. Though rather tired with being on foot nearly all



day, he sang and whistled all the way home; and running in, "O, grandfather," said he, "I have so much to tell you; but I must give poor Roughy his supper first."

He laid down his handkerchief and the bottle of beer, and then ran out to clean and feed his donkey; then he washed himself, and, coming back, jumped on his grandfather's neck:

"Good news, good news, grandfather! she is such a kind lady! and she is to stay at Malvern all the summer, and she will hire Roughy and me for all the time; and I shall not have to go to the stand with those rude boys; and I am to have some new clothes with silver buttons!" Here Joe was forced to stop for want of breath. "And there's one more thing I've got to tell you, but not till supper.—It's supper-time already, I think; so I'll go to work." And off he was to lay the cloth, gather some radishes, wash them, and set them and the bread and cheese on the table. Then he laid his meat in a dish, and placed it and the beer before the old man.

"Here is my secret, grandfather."

"What's this, Joe?" said he. "I

hope you have not been begging of the servants,—you know I don't like those ways—they have no right to give away their mistress's goods."

"No, indeed, grandfather. The lady herself ordered me some dinner; and Mr. Thomas said it was no odds whether I ate it there or carried it home."

"Bless thee, my boy; but you must have some."

"No, no," said Joe; "it will do you good, grandfather; and here's a supper fit for a king,"—pointing to the bread and cheese and radishes,—“if he were as hungry as I am.”

The old man said grace; and in thanking God for His mercies, he thought of the comfort of having a good child.

"Joe," said he, "you know the text: 'Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.' But here I have the stalled ox and the love too; and all thanks to my dear boy."

Joe's heart swelled within him. He saw that Isaac ate with more relish than he had done for months. And nothing that he could have had to eat would have given him half the pleasure

he now had in thinking that, by denying himself when he felt inclined to eat what had been set before him, he had been able to do his grandfather good. His tongue ran all supper-time; and he would have sat up for hours telling all he had seen and heard, and how the lady patted Roughy and praised him; but the old man reminded him that he must be up early next morning; and after their evening prayer they went to bed.

It was some time before Joe could get to sleep; the thoughts of so many people and things that were quite new to him ran in his head. But, by degrees, the lady, the cross man-servant, the good-natured cook, and even his jacket with round silver buttons, began to swim before his eyes; and he was fast asleep.

Next morning his grandfather called him; he jumped up.

"Your good supper and beer have made me sleep like a top, Joe. I've hardly had any pain all night."

Here was a new pleasure for Joe.

The old man's heart was much lighter this morning in parting with him; and

he felt that his prayer was heard, and his child, for the present at least, was preserved from temptation.

Perhaps I may one day write another book about Joe and Roughy.



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